

Give me Mr Fuji and paper mache

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Gaming didn't exactly *turn* Japanesey, it was from the start. The Japanese have been responsible for some of the best known and most respected titles in history, so it's no wonder the western world were so anxious to hop aboard their coattails and cadge a ride.



We enjoyed or *endured* various ports of arcade coin-op classics over the years, yet other developers were more oriented towards devising *original* works, albeit with a Japanese flair. Hence Psygnosis's Leander.

Actually Psygnosis just *published* it, whilst Traveller's Tales were commissioned with the development duties. Imbibing the exquisite visual and audio presentation like a savoured fine malt, it's an easy trap to fall into. A mistake we're steered into making, cognisant of the much-loved Liverpoolian outfit's track record.



Jon Burton and Andy Ingram are credited for its coding, design and enchanting graphics. Simon James for additional creature design, and Tim Wright, Lee Wright, Matthew Simons, and Jon Burton for the music and sound effects.

David Dootson (now studio manager at Traveller's Tales) was responsible for porting Leander to the Mega Drive where it was known as the Legend of Galahad, this time published by Electronic Arts. Beyond the name switch, it features an overhauled plot, marginally tweaked interface, different music and a more vibrant colour palette.

You play as the eponymous, cutesy, medieval knight, dipped in a vat of anime juice and commanded to go forth and crusade. It's a traditional 'prince saves princess' affair, though unusual for early action game fiction, the plot is expanded over seven pages of the manual to add depth to the 2D characters. It covers their motivations, status in life

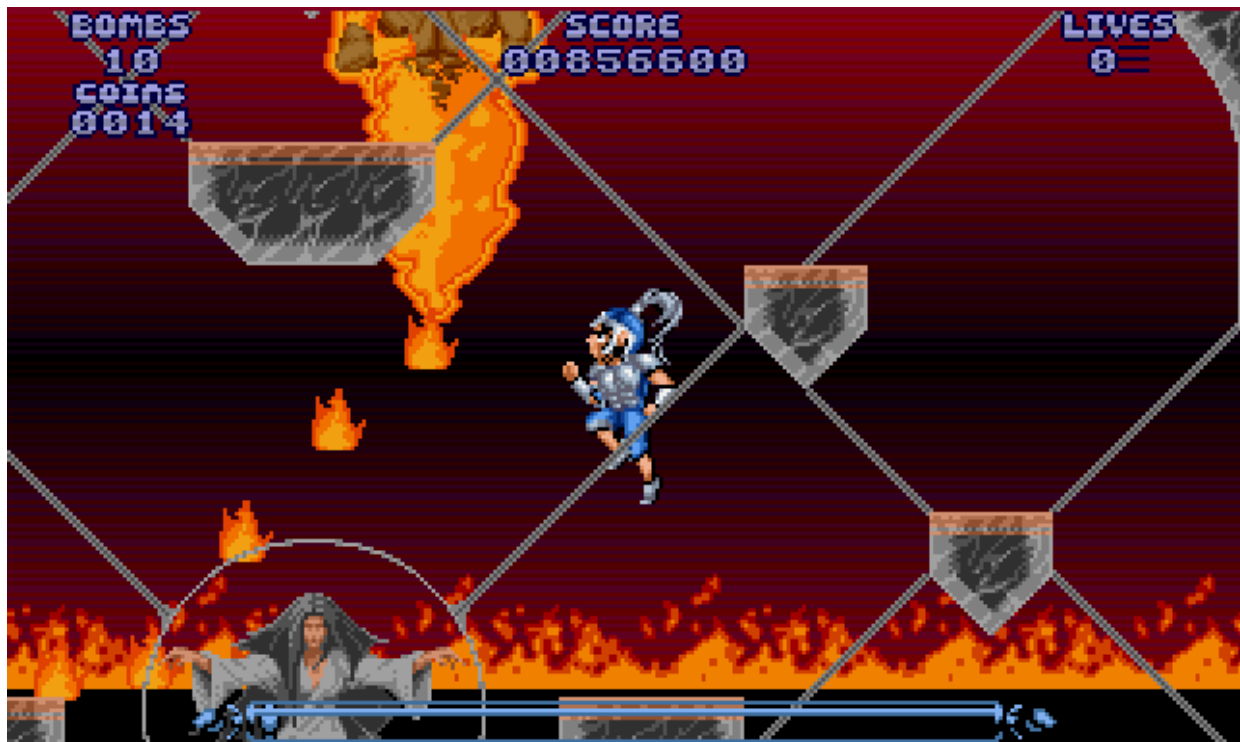
and connections to one another, wrapped in a whimsical, fantasy land narrative with a pretty bow on top.



I won't rehash it in its entirety here, just the highlights...

It's Princess Lucanna's eighteenth birthday and everyone in Honshu is partying like it's 1999 in the Temple of Kiromo. Prince (or *symbol* if you prefer) wasn't there because he had a prior engagement to attend. He sent his best wishes and apologies.

Anyway, Thanatos. He's a big bad flying man-dragon hybrid creature who's been held prisoner beneath the earth for... oh, I don't know, *ages*, rises up from his "filthy pit of anguish" (that's a quote that bit) and vows to avenge his mistreatment. It doesn't say what he did to deserve this, only that he's proper evil.



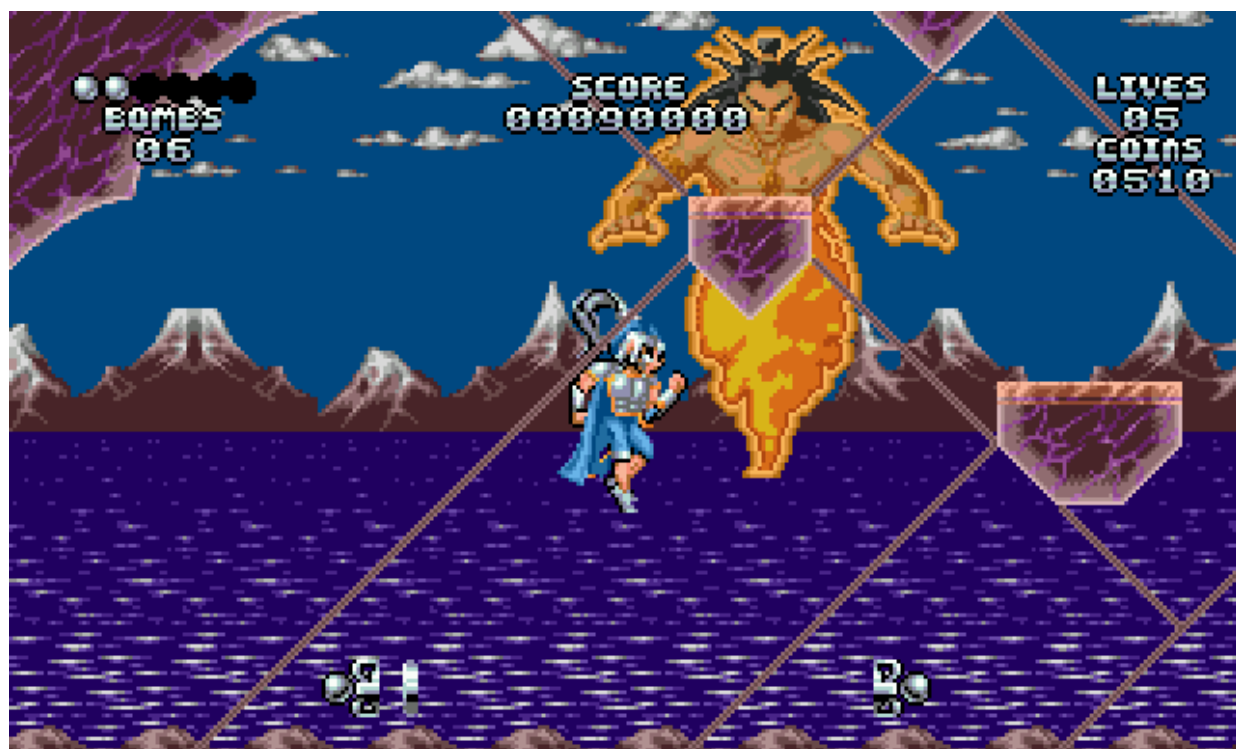
Wait, "a thousand years" it says here. That's how long death has been trapped down there for. These people must be *very* old. Death is the English translation of Thanatos, a character from Greek mythology. Did I mention that?

Princess Lucanna is the emperor's daughter, that's important too. And I should have said Leander is the captain of the guards who protect her from harmful stuff, well, all except for mouldy old dragons. No-one expects a birthday shindig to be gate-crashed by a giant dragon. Not even a little one that would fit inside a Kinder Egg, or the Spanish Inquisition come to think of it.

Leander secretly loves Lucanna and *she* secretly loves him back, in secret. It's all super hush-hush because he thinks he'll lose his noggin if daddy rumbles them. You know how it is; paupers aren't supposed to cavort with royalty.

Thanatos isn't the lovey-dovey type so doesn't think twice about kidnapping Lucanna and retreating back to his lair to

feel smug. Oh, and to replenish his life force by sapping hers. In the meantime, Emperor Entoroshi (that's Lucanna's daddy), summons Leander knowing he's got the hots for his daughter, and commands him to go and fetch her back and duff up Thanatos.



Entoroshi informs Leander that his mystical aid, Janoon, will assist him by sending her three Sirens as guides. We don't find out what happened to the pet dog Cousin, Susonne, gave to Lucanna as a birthday present. It doesn't even have a name, poor thing.



Leander (or 'Lion-Man' if you prefer), like Thanatos, is the name of a character from Greek mythology, though otherwise, their stories bear little resemblance. That is beyond both being in a relationship involving people of diametrically opposed social standing that goes a bit awry. Traveller's Tales' Leander got the better deal I think; at least he didn't drown.

Traveller's Tales - trivia fans - is the name of a chapter in Cosmos, a book written by Carl Sagan. So now you know.

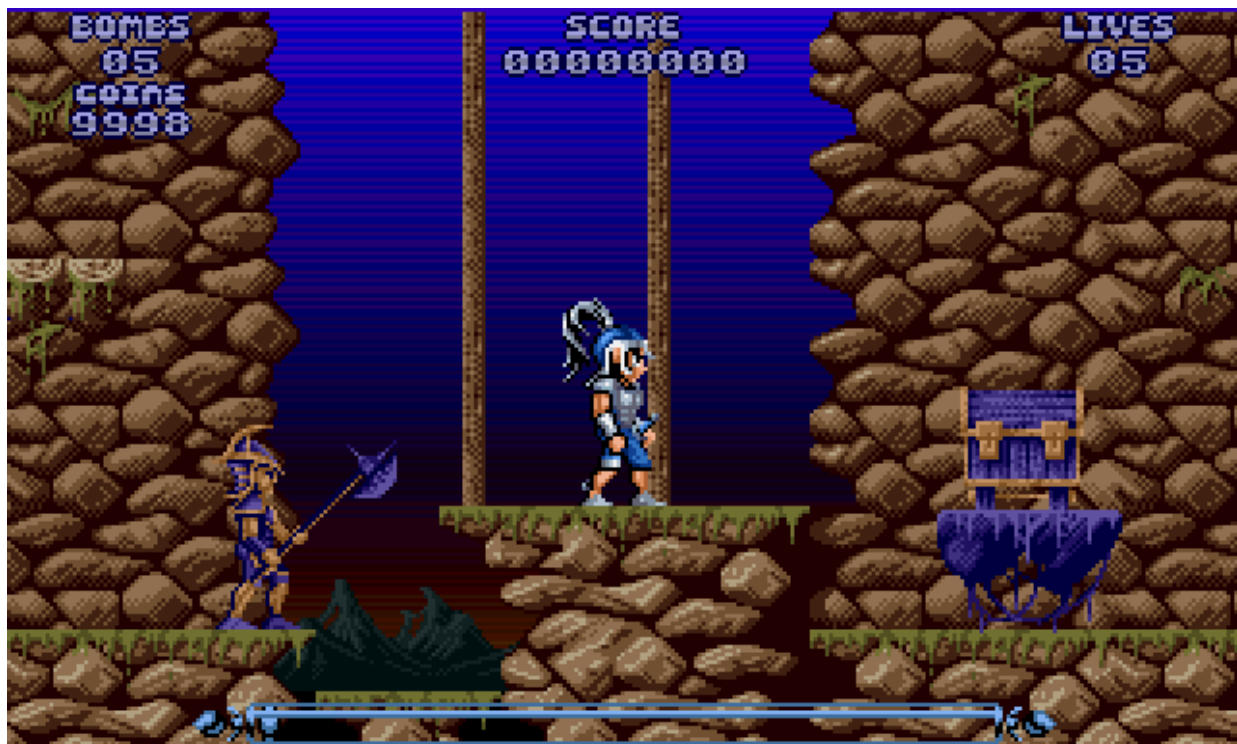
Also - trivia-ly speaking - the end credits of Leander indicate that it was to be granted a sequel entitled 'Tigrander' ('Tiger-Man'), though it never came to fruition. Perhaps we should start at the beginning, as I believe is the tradition. This isn't Memento.

Leander is a traditional scrolling platformer at its core with few novelties to call its own. You wander in any one of the eight directional possibilities, engaging various weapons to

vanquish enemies, upgrade them in sparsely located torture huts hosted by an elfin-like maid, and defeat end-of-level bosses, who put in an appearance just prior to commencing the next explorey bit. That's how that works.



In addition to swapping coins and jewels for death-dealing devices such as force, tempest and lion blades, armour upgrades and magic potions, said Sirens serve as our tour guides on the road to Damascus. Preceding each stage they lay out what's expected of us. Invariably this entails recovering an object such as a crown or key from a chest guarded by otherworldly miscreants. Then bringing it back to the extreme opposite end of the level to use it.



If it all gets a bit much to bear, you might like to consider suicide by rune bomb. No, *really* - crouch while holding down the fire button until the Almighty Bar of Doom fills up, then release it to witness the explosive results. This delivers twenty hit points to any opponents in proximity, instantly annihilating them; the minor drawback being that you're considered collateral damage. In effect, you might like to ensure you can spare a life before pulling the plug, and are also really desperate. In fact, you're physically unable to deploy rune bombs if you're down to your last life, which seems pretty logical. Should you use one to destroy a boss, they generously leave a 1up behind, helping you to get back on track.

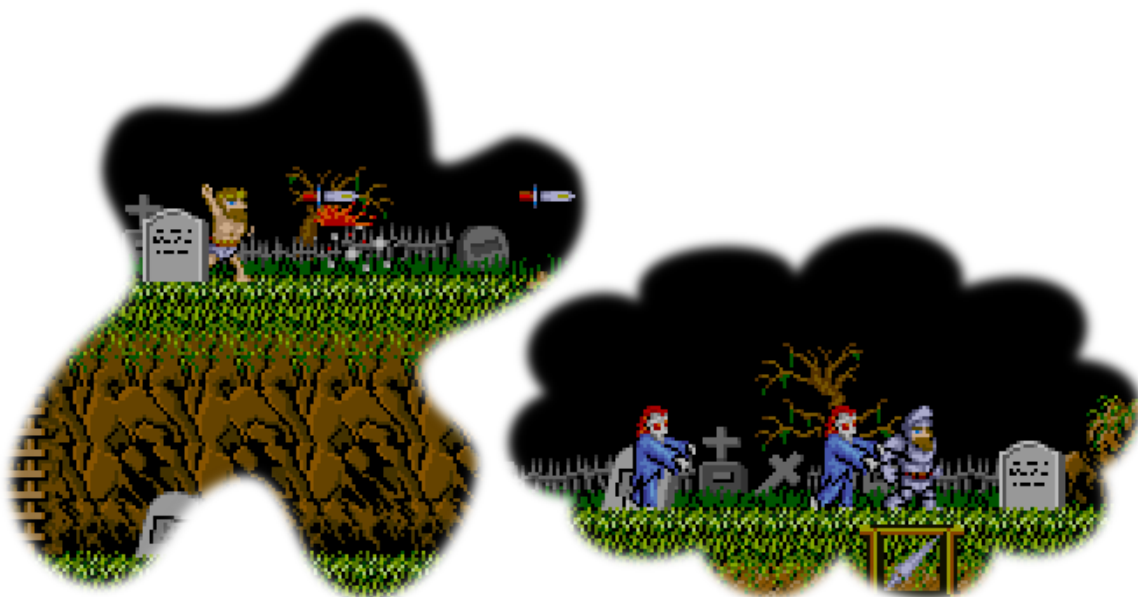


Once you've bagged a level's designated object an icon appears in the top right corner of the screen to indicate the job's a good 'un and you're ready to locate the portal to the next stage. However, fail to collect it swiftly enough and the sought after object transforms into a skull that summons Thanatos's Ethereal Presence out from under his rock when pocketed. You'll need several rune bombs to destroy it - just the one will only cause him to change direction.

Three selectable levels of difficulty - accompanied by an appropriate allocation of armour hit points and enemy AI competency on a sliding scale - ensure the game can be tweaked to accommodate players of varying platforming prowess.

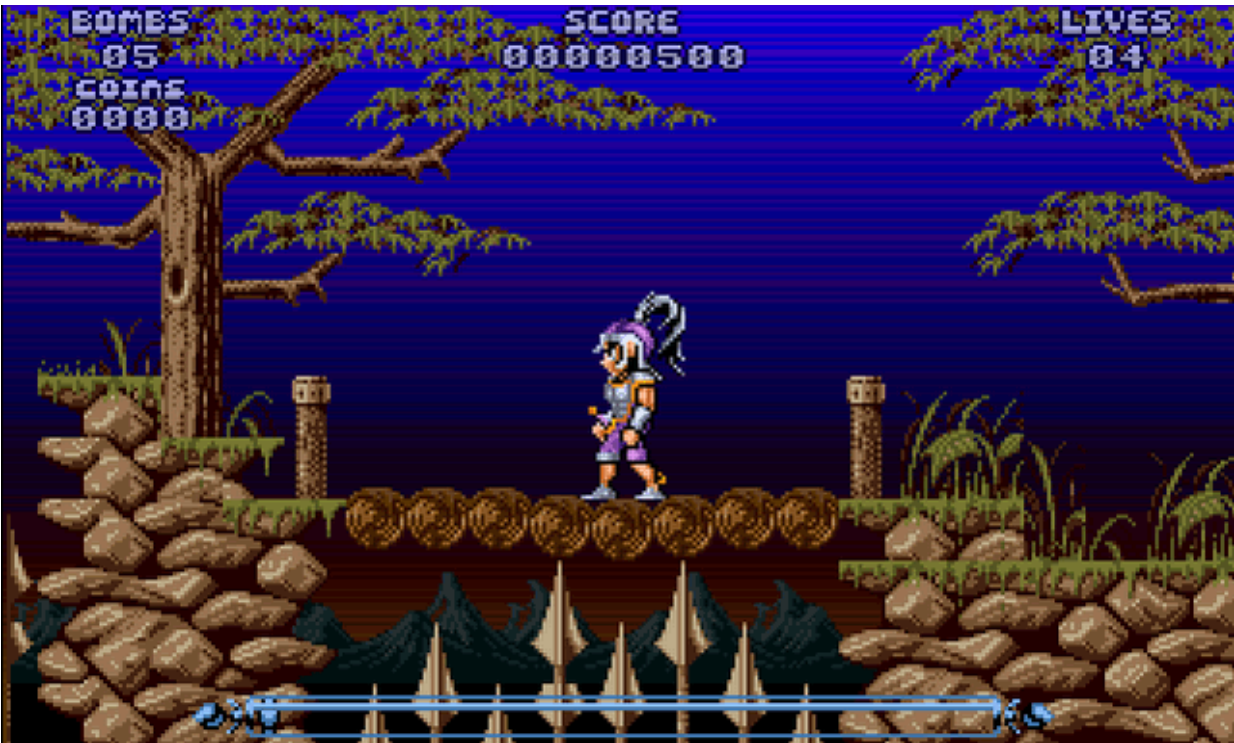
Rather than an energy bar, the state of Leander's health is communicated via the colour of his armour. We begin as a dark knight (no, not Batman, he won't be born for several centuries), and as we absorb hits gradually become more light and colourful. A lovely purple hue denotes the final straw, after which we expire, fragmenting into a kaleidoscope of metal shards.

This was unusual, though certainly not unique; Capcom did something similar with Ghosts 'n' Goblins way back in 1985, and it's not the only example. Interestingly this system was substituted with a traditional energy bar for the Mega Drive port.



Another welcome bonus is two-button joystick support. With the right peripherals you can use one button to jump, and another for buckling your swash as you dodge protruding spikes and navigate eerie caves on the lookout for that elusive holy grail.

As in Shadow of the Beast, unexpectedly being poked with sharp objects is a recurring theme, one that's referred to several times in the manual. On one occasion it gives advice on avoiding "getting a spike up his bum"... which is why I can't get the image of Edward II's barbaric execution out of my head. Thanks Jon!



Judging by the familiarity of the mammoth insects, another game from which we can draw parallels - as pointed out by Dan Waddington of Lemon Amiga fame - is the graphically seductive Lionheart. Nonetheless, as this was released two years *after* Leander, any inspiration derived would have flowed in the *opposite* direction.

Let's hope you're packing something more potent than Bug Away when you meet *these* critters! Luckily Leander *doesn't* share any of our furry-faced chum's unfortunate ineptitude in the handling department.

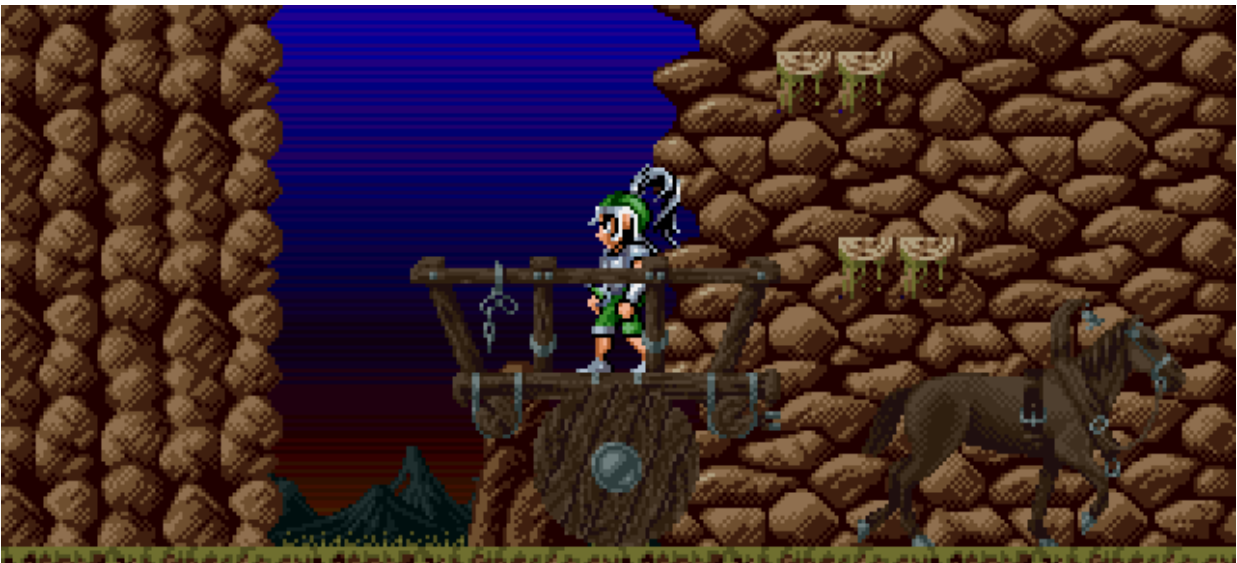


Once you've adapted to the slight floaty inertia and occasionally janky AI in effect you'll find the controls, in

general, have been competently fine-tuned, making the protagonist a joy to chaperone. All that will hamper you in this regard is the inability to fire while crouching. I expect that was introduced as a deliberate Achilles heel to accentuate the challenge, though it's simply frustrating and seems very unnatural.

If all that bunny-hopping gets a bit tiring, en route you can rest your weary bones by climbing aboard a horse and cart. Once aligned with the otherwise unreachable platform above, it can be used as a springboard to progression. Don't be concerned that the horse isn't technically connected to the cart; it's magic!

If you're running certain cracked versions of the game your ride fails to materialise, leaving you up the creek without a horse. It doesn't appear that this formed part of its devious copyright protection system, it's just a glitch introduced by third parties.



Another similar gotcha occurs later where a crucial platform becomes permeable and therefore useless if you aren't playing a genuine copy (or a more effectively cracked counterfeit). This one definitely *is* a deliberate impediment

courtesy of the developers. Jon Burton explains precisely how this mechanism works in a highly technical video featured on his own YouTube channel. I'm sure the coders amongst you will get a kick out of that.

"The crack uses the extra chip ram. The original game runs in the base 512kb memory. I used so much memory there wasn't enough room for them to crack it and stay in memory, hence the extra 512kb for the hack. Although if you had the 512kb extra I used it for the shop so it didn't need to load midlevel.



The missing platform was copy protection to effectively turn the game into a demo. I knew whoever cracked it wouldn't test beyond the first few levels. I also doubled the enemy hit points if cracked..."

Coder and founder of Traveller's Tales, Jon Burton



All this clever self-sabotage explains why there are so many variants of Leander doing the rounds online. You know how it is; group x takes great delight in declaring group y's crack to be botched and so attempt to remedy the situation with their own release.

I don't imagine any of this converted pirate 'purchases' into legitimate ones as most players would assume the game was broken, or they were incompetent, and simply never bother with it again. I suppose though it had more to do with the developers getting one over on the pirates and freeloaders, which is perfectly understandable.

Assuming you knew what was crippling the game, the best way to be sure you could play it from start to finish without being hobbled by the copy protection was to buy the genuine article, thus rewarding the developers for their blood, sweat and tears. I'm sure there was plenty shed of each in this case. It's hardly a ten-minute AMOS tutorial exercise!



'Epic quest' seems an appropriate way to describe what lies ahead. It's therefore fortunate that you respawn where you died, and level access codes are offered to allow you to return to previously encountered levels without having to start again from scratch. With 3 worlds, each broken up into 7 levels, there's plenty to sink your teeth into. Which would be the perfect cue to mention that Traveller's Tales also developed the SNES and Mega Drive versions of Bram Stoker's Dracula on behalf of Psygnosis, except I've already written a book on that one, so I won't.

Most people will never get to experience the later, more creative levels of Leander's expansive universe because the difficulty curve is brutally steep, and the (selectively) respawning opposition unrelenting. You were unquestionably getting your money's worth if you bought this at full price upon release. Unless of course you gave up at the first hurdle, threw a tantrum and hurled the disks in the nearest moat.



Leander employs hardware sprites to ensure the animation remains silky smooth at all times, perfectly complimenting the studiously polished presentation evidenced throughout.

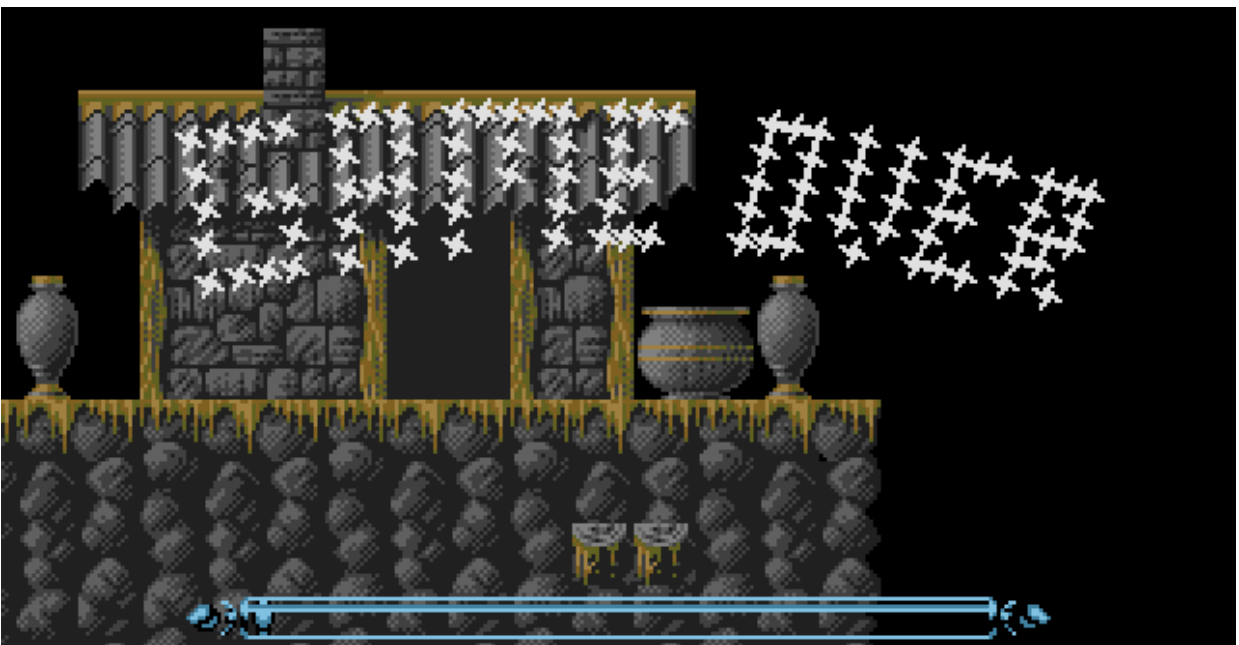
Leander's quest kicks off with a cinematic, animated introduction sequence depicting our hero charging ferociously towards a rippling-muscled orc-like creature, amidst a decaying forest. We rapidly cut to this static demi-nemesis deer in the headlights, whilst an abrupt auditory transition subdues the tension-infused soundtrack as he prepares to absorb the onslaught and protect his territory.



Flipping momentarily back to Leander's perspective and his climactic signature motif, the anxiety is ratcheted back up as he closes in for the kill. A blinding fluorescence punctuates the fatal clash as a shrill cry pierces the gloom.

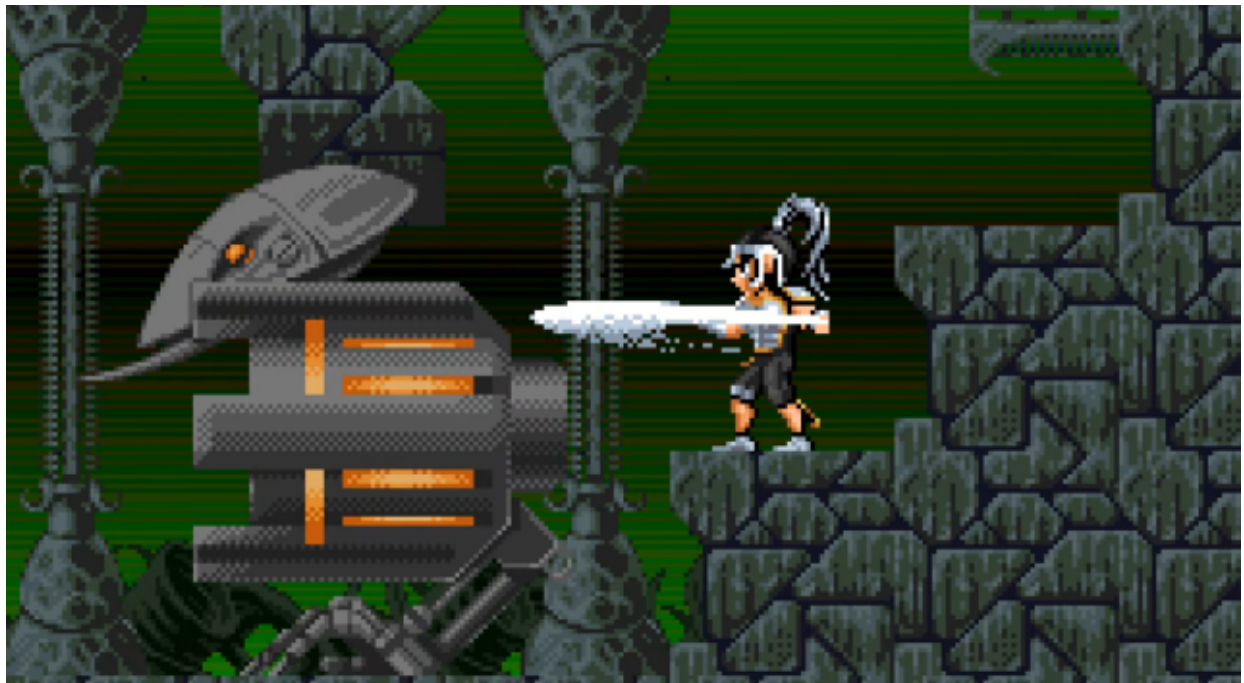


From entrance to demise, the premium grade quality never slips. Case in point, even the plume on our protagonist's helmet is meticulously animated, while dancing text broadcasting the game over and continue screen message is beautifully stylised. If you followed the demo scene back then, these will certainly be a nostalgic nod to your well-spent youth.



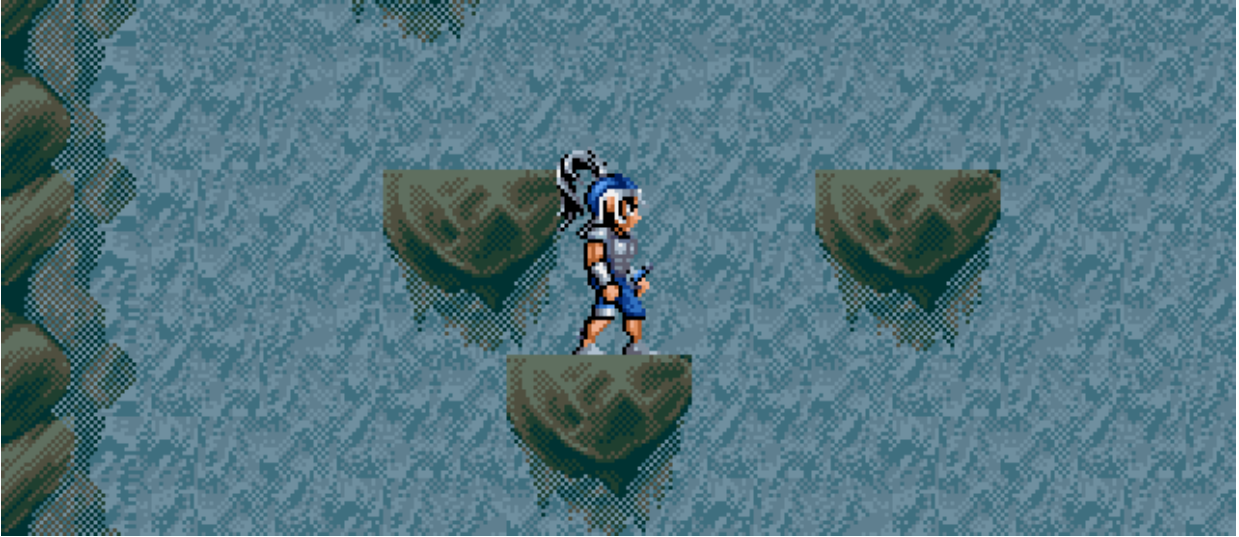
The not quite as pretty Atari ST version. See if you can spot the missing colour gradients in the background. No prizes mind you.

Attention to detail extends to including cameos from Lemmings and Killing Game Show sprites, as mentioned in the opening credits. A nice touch for Psygnosis fans, though it's not much of an Easter egg if you announce their inclusion from the outset. Where's the element of surprise?



Ambient weather effects, undulating waves and the semi-transparent static of the denim-textured waterfalls are the icing on the cake.





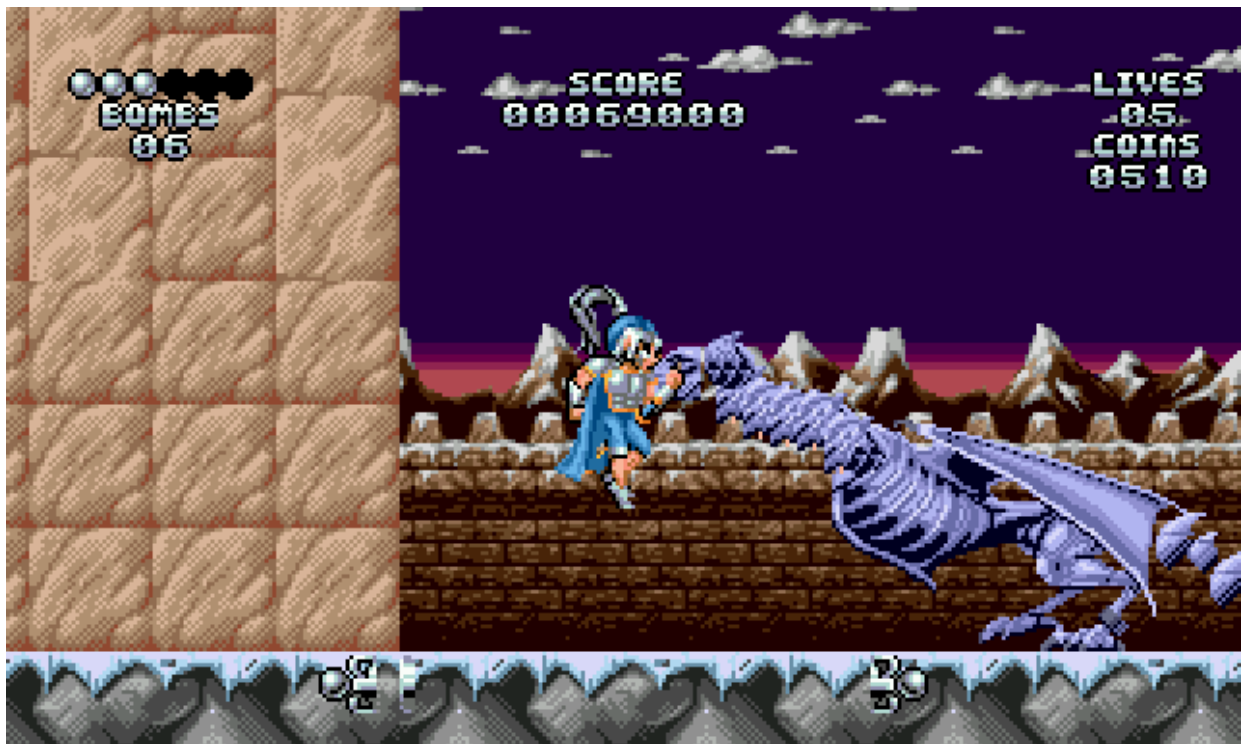
You *could* say, if the visuals are the icing, the equally absorbing audio must be the marzipan. Though that would just be nuts. I'll pause here a while to let the applause dissipate.....



Thank you.

No, honesty-really-properly though, the music is top-notch. Leander incorporates 11 memorable tunes and upwards of 60 equally striking sound effects. Together they engender an atmosphere of intrigue, though unlike *Shadow of the Beast*, there's no undercurrent of foreboding intrepidation beyond the opening introduction. Here the earlier tunes are breezy and dainty, jazzed up later by a dalliance with gloriously inappropriate electronica.

Nonetheless, the tracks intrinsically linked to Leander evoke scenes of polite, medieval, sovereign banquets, rather than savage battles with fire-breathing dragons, goblin archers and steely-gazed knights.



Galahad tries his hand at dragon taming in the Mega Drive port.

Yet if instilling a sense of dread was the goal I don't suppose we'd find ourselves pitted against elves dropping bombs from pedalo-powered hot air balloons.



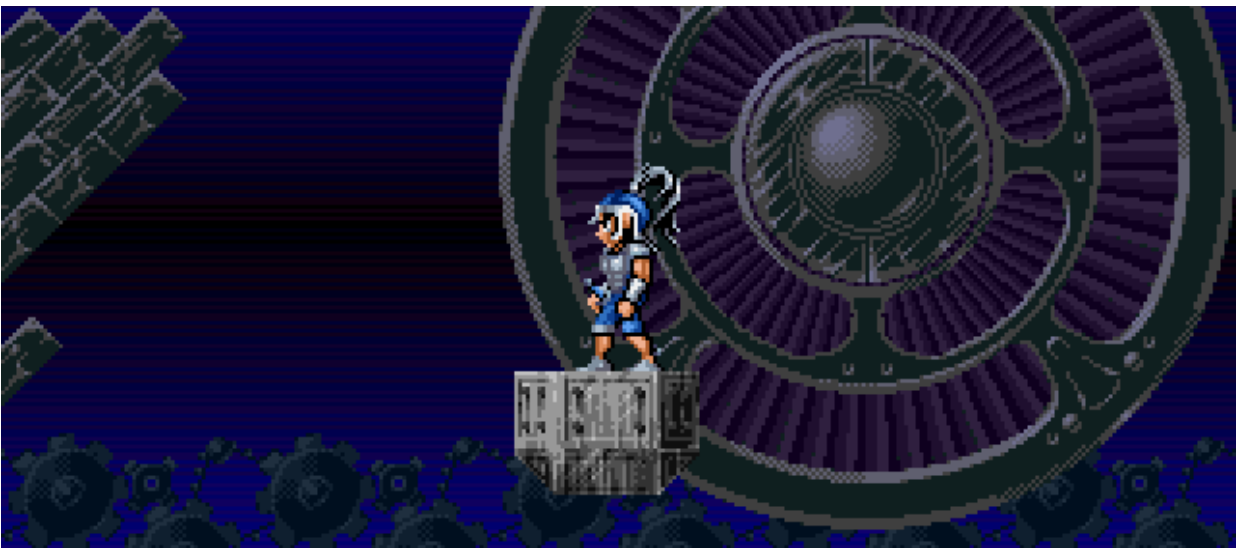
...or strongmen sporting Speedos and rolling barrels into your path a la Donkey Kong.



Seeing as simultaneous sound effects and music isn't an option in the Amiga version (it *is* if you're playing on the Mega Drive), we are at least treated to the opportunity to appreciate each individually on its own merits. This, as you might expect, programmer, Jon Burton, has revealed to be

due to the limitation of available memory resources. Nevertheless, if you were a computer hardware retailer back in the early '90s and needed a game to showcase your wares, Leander would no doubt register high on the list of contenders.

Despite enjoying a mostly warm reception from the critics, and reaching number 5 in the Gallup sales charts in March 1992 (see C&VG), fundamentally, what it lacks is innovation and variety. Even back in 1991, Leander wasn't pushing any boundaries. Nevertheless, while it only seeks to reinvent the wheel, there's no denying Leander embellishes it with some spectacular hub caps, captivating contemporary gamers even today.



I'm just standing here watching the wheels go round and round, I really love to watch them roll.

Accordingly, Leander duplicates the polish of many console games of the era without weighing in to match the addictive gameplay or longevity. All of which explains why it's so fondly remembered for its arresting visual and aural artistry, and otherwise sidelined as just another humdrum platformer in need of a USP.

